

Idaho Roadless Rule Briefing Paper

Project Name: North Fork Aspen 2 - Roadless

Forest/District: Nez Perce – Clearwater; North Fork District

Date: 4/15/2019

Roadless Area: Mallard-Larkins, Meadow Creek-Upper North Fork, and Rawhide

Management Theme: Mallard-Larkins - Backcountry Restoration

Meadow Creek-Upper North Fork - Primitive

Rawhide – Wild Land Recreation

Project Status: Small NEPA CE Preparing to Scope

Dates Presented to Commission: New Project - Not yet presented.

Key Contact: Mike Pruss, Wildlife Program Manager, 208-935-4256

Project Area: Project area is composed of 13 aspen clones in 3 aspen meta-areas (Wallow, Kelly, and Long Creek), all located within the North Fork drainage of the Clearwater River. Vegetation surrounding aspen clones is comprised of decadent shrubfields and mixed conifer stands dominated by Douglas fir and grand fir. Clones range in size from 5.4 to 24.4 acres, with a mean size of 13 acres, and total acreage of 168.4 (see Project Map). The Wallow and Kelly clone meta-areas are within the Mallard-Larkins Backcountry Restoration, one clone of the Long Creek meta-area is in the Meadow Creek-Upper North Fork Primitive, and two Long Creek clones are in the Rawhide Wild Land Recreation. A companion aspen project proposed outside the Roadless areas is addressing 3 adjacent aspen clones.

Purpose and Need: Aspen provides an uncommon, but important, forest component for several terrestrial wildlife species, including Region 1 Sensitive Species, Flammulated owl. Aspen is an important forage species for both elk and moose. Aspen clones are uncommon in the North Fork drainage, and throughout the Nez Perce – Clearwater National Forest. Aspen clones typically expand by root suckers extending out from the existing clone. This expansion is triggered by a disturbance, such as fire, wind-throw or cutting. Expansion is often limited by geologic features (bedrock) and competition with other woody vegetation. This project will provide the physical disturbance to the mature aspen trees themselves, coupled with the reduction of competition by cutting and girdling competing conifers and over-mature shrubs. The project will help maintain and increase the plant diversity on the forest.

This project is within the Lolo Elk Management Zone, an area that historically provided habitat for one of the largest elk herds in North America. Elk habitat and elk populations have declined dramatically in the Lolo Zone in the past decade, partially due to declining habitat quality. Early seral habitats maintained and created by disturbance will provide needed summer and winter forage for elk and moose.

Benefits of this project include but are not limited to: improving sensitive species habitat, improving big game winter and summer range, diversifying habitat types and vegetation cover, promoting early seral vegetation, and creating a mosaic pattern across the landscape which can reduce the potential for large catastrophic wildfires by limiting their size and severity.

Proposed Action: There are 13 proposed clone treatments totaling 168.4 acres. Mature aspen will be felled on site, retaining 2-5 mature trees/clone. Small competing conifers will be slashed, and left dispersed on site. Larger conifers will be girdled and left standing for snags to allow for fuels to break down over time. Over-mature brush will be slashed and left dispersed on site. Work will be conducted by FS staff using chainsaws and other hand tools. No motorized timber equipment will be used. Regional Forester concurrence, if necessary, for cutting in roadless and any clearances as identified in the burn plan will be procured prior to implementation of those components.

No proposed clones are located in RHCA's. No slashing, cutting or girdling will be done in RHCA's.

No cutting will occur within old growth timber.

Below is a Table of the proposed clones to be treated with acres, management area, and roadless designation.

Area	Clone	Acres	Mgmt Area (MA)	Roadless Name	Roadless Type
Wallow	1	11.8	US	Mallard-Larkins	Backcountry Restoration
Wallow	2	11.1	US	Mallard-Larkins	Backcountry Restoration
Wallow	3	8.2	US	Mallard-Larkins	Backcountry Restoration
Wallow	4	19.7	E1	Mallard-Larkins	Backcountry Restoration
Wallow	5	13.4	US/E1	Mallard-Larkins	Backcountry Restoration
Kelly	1	5.4	C4/E1	Mallard-Larkins	Backcountry Restoration
Kelly	2	18	C4	Mallard-Larkins	Backcountry Restoration
Kelly	3	24.4	E1/A3	Mallard-Larkins	Backcountry Restoration
Kelly	4	10.8	E1	Mallard-Larkins	Backcountry Restoration
Kelly	5	11.4	E1	Mallard-Larkins	Backcountry Restoration
Long Creek	3	9.2	C8S	Meadow Creek - Upper North Fork	Primitive
Long Creek	4	7.3	E1	Rawhide	Wild Land Recreation
Long Creek	5	17.7	E1	Rawhide	Wild Land Recreation
Total		168.4			

The project areas can be accessed from Forest Road 250 from Pierce, Idaho. It can also be accessed from Superior, MT, also on Forest Road 250.

Work could begin in the fall of 2019 or 2020, as soon as Heritage reviews are complete, and could continue as weather and resources allow in the fall until all clones are complete.

Flammulated owl monitoring will be conducted on a 5-year basis to monitor use of the area long-term.

Rule References:

The tree cutting activity component of the proposed action falls under the following stipulation:

- Subpart C §294.24(c)(2) Any action authorized pursuant to paragraphs § 294.24(c)(1)(ii) through (v) shall be approved by the Regional Forester and limited to situations that, in the Regional Forester's judgment: (i) Maintains or improves one or more of the roadless characteristics over the long-term; (ii) Maximizes the retention of large trees as appropriate for the forest type to the extent the trees promote fire-resilient stands; and (iii) Is consistent with land management plan components as provided for in § 294.28(d).

Project involves cutting non-commercial trees using slashing/cutting/girdling treatments to improve habitat for flammulated owls, both Sensitive Species §294.24(c)(1)(iii) and to maintain and restore the characteristics of ecosystem composition, structure and processes of the Aspen clones within the project area §294.24(c)(1)(iv). The treatment will allow for the retention of a diversity of plant and animal communities §294.23(3) and habitat for sensitive species §294.23(4) over the long-term §294.24(c)(2)(i), maximizes the retention of Aspen clones as appropriate for that forest type, promoting fire resilient stands §294.24(c)(2)(ii); and maintains consistency with land management plan components as provided for in §294.28(d).

Scoping comments/objections: Have not scoped yet.

Timeline: Small NEPA scoping will be external by normal distribution methods in May - July 2019. Comment period for external scoping is generally 14 days, depending on Ranger determination (1-30 days). If no issues that would cause there to be a significant effect are identified in comments, the project would move forward. Depending on the Heritage report, it can be complete, or forwarded to the State Historic Preservation Office or review, typically 30 days (2 weeks to 2 months is possible). When this process is complete, the Ranger could sign the decision, which could range from June to August, 2019, depending on Heritage resource issues.

Summary

- 1. Road Construction/Reconstruction:** No road construction or reconstruction will occur on this project.
- 2. Timber Cutting, Sale, or Removal:** Yes. Up to 168.4 acres of cutting and retaining of mature aspen, slashing over-mature shrubs, slashing and non-commercial cutting of small diameter competing conifers, and girdling and retaining larger competing conifers. This will

not be continuous across the clones, as these trees and shrubs are discontinuous and spotty.

3. **Discretionary Minerals:** No minerals will be removed as a component of this project. No active mining claims exist within the project area.
4. **Modification or Correction:** The activity does not require a modification or correction.

Responsible Official: Andrew Skowland, North Fork District Ranger, Nez Perce – Clearwater National Forest